THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Government has been continuously monitoring and assessing the situation arising out of the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11th September, 2001 and subsequent developments, including the ongoing military campaign against the Taliban and the Al Qaeda network in Afghanistan.

(b) Government believes that the destruction of the Taliban and Al Qaeda network in Afghanistan and the establishment of a moderate, broad-based and multi-ethnic government there, together with the increased international focus on combating terrorism, will have a salutary effect on the problem of terrorism in India.

(c) Government supports the ongoing military campaign against the Taliban and Al Qaeda network as an important step in the global war against terrorism and its sponsors everywhere in the world. The issue of international terrorism, including the Taliban's support to it, has been a subject of on going discussions and resolutions in the United National and its Security Council.

New Scheme for Passport seekers

†1900. DR. A. K. PATEL : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any new scheme is under Government's consideration for benefit of the persons desirous of getting passports;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the parts of the country where Government propose to implement it?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) Yes Sir. The Govt, has decided to decentralise the passport services and to bring these services closer to the people. Under this scheme, the passport applicants can deposit their filled passport application forms through the network of designated Speed Post Centres of the Deptt, of Posts and the SP/DM's office in each District. The forms will be scrutinzed and documents checked by

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

these offices and then forwarded to the Passport Office who will issue the passports. The Scheme is already operational at 31 designated Speed Post Centres in various parts of the country.

Passport Office at Siliguri

1901. SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government feel the necessity of opening a Passport Office at Siliguri, West Bengal; and

(b) if so, by when such office is going to be opened?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) No Sir. There is already a Passport Application Collection Centre (PACC) at Siliguri in West Bengal. Opening of new Passport Office is governed by certain criteria such as the location of existing offices and volume of applications from a particular region. Besides, as per the recommendations of the Standing Committee of Parliament on the MEA, there should be at least 50,000 applications for passport per year from an area where a new Passport Office is to be opened. This criterion is not met for the 6 districts of North Bengal which are being served by the PACC at Siliguri. However, steps are being taken to decentralise the collection of passport applications at the district level through the District Authorities.

(b) Does not arise.

Casual workers employed in Passport Offices

1902. SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there are hundreds of casual workers employed in different Passport Offices in the country;

(b) if so, whether these casual employees are performing the jobs of perennial nature;

(c) if so, whether, the question of security in processing the passports may be compromised;